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Language Capability in the United States Air Force.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: United States Air Force Language Proficiency

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Thesis: In order to address its language capability shortfalls, the USAF needs to establish a language office, determine language requirements, identify the appropriate personnel with the required language proficiency and recognize the value of the Air Reserve Components as a strategic reserve.

Discussion: The Air Force has met most of its language needs, but just barely. When a crisis arises, the USAF hastily tries to identify language-proficient personnel in the officer and enlisted ranks, or hire native speakers on a contract basis. But, emerging critical language requirements are not being met and current contracting practices are insufficient to meet demand. The Air Force does not have a language office to create an overarching language plan. It has started, but a recently released draft plan still relies on old methods and excludes the Air Reserve Components. The ability of Air Force personnel to speak a foreign language is a critical component to effectively conduct world-wide military operations in the 21st century. To effectively meet these missions and other emerging contingencies, the USAF needs to develop and maintain a corps of personnel with language expertise. Identifying language needs is just as important as identifying language-proficient personnel. To be strategic, the Air Force must identify what languages are required, which career fields need language capabilities, and at what rank requires language-proficiency. Finally, the Air Force is a total force. By excluding the Air National Guard or the Air Force Reserve from the overall language plan, failure to identify their language capability or failure to determine which languages they require, the Air Force will fall short of meeting the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap's objectives.

Conclusion: Creating a language program in the Air Force is the first step. Identifying language proficiency and managing language requirements are the next two steps. Then pursuing ideas on how to meet the goals of the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap can proceed—with a total force perspective.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

> *"Just as we were ill-equipped to deal with the technological threats of the*
> *Cold War era, today we lack the linguistic and cultural skills and resources*
> *fundamental to competing in the new international environment."*
> > -Former Senator David Boren (D-Okla)
> > *Chairman, Senate Intelligence Committee*

Background

As noted in the above quote, language and cultural skills are inherently intertwined—and lacking in the United States Air Force (USAF). The lead USAF office for developing and preparing internationally skilled Air Force officers with a language and cultural area background is Secretary of the Air Force, International Affairs (SAF/IA). The Language and Area Studies Immersion program within SAF/IA offers courses of study for officers that link language and cultural training together. The premier language training center for the Department of Defense (DoD) is the Defense Language Institute (DLI) which focuses solely on language training for enlisted and officers. The Joint Special Operations University (JSOU), which prepares enlisted and officers with a regional perspective, offers area courses that focus solely on culture training, but overall, language and culture training are inextricably linked. For the purposes of this paper, the author will focus solely on language training.

The Air Force has tried to implement language programs over the years with minimal success. A 1988 Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) assessment noted that military attachés lacked functional language skills.[1] A 2005 article states that the Air Force does not have a viable language program to meet the current language requirements for its forces to operate effectively in many foreign countries.[2] This situation is not new; in every war in its history, the United States military has turned to native speakers, and each time the native speakers were sought on a last-minute basis.

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The Air Force has met most of its language needs, but just barely. When a crisis arises, the USAF hastily tries to identify language-proficient personnel in the officer and enlisted ranks, or hire native speakers on a contract basis. In order to address its language capability shortfalls, the USAF needs to establish a language office, determine language requirements, identify the appropriate personnel with the required language proficiency and recognize the value of the Air Reserve Components (ARC) as a strategic reserve.

Research Assumptions and Objectives

The analysis of this paper is focused on four core areas: why language skills are critical in today's global environment; where the USAF has fallen short on language-proficient personnel; how current systems are not meeting requirements; and how the ARC can help the Air Force meet some of the language requirements. The governing assumptions in this analysis are:

1. Not every member in the Air Force needs to be a linguist;

2. Language skills are not developed overnight;

3. The Air Force needs to use the language skills of its officers;[3]

4. The need for less common languages will increase; and

5. Increased use of coalition partners and transitioning to a more expeditionary force will increase language requirements[4]

Emerging critical language requirements are not being met and current contracting practices are insufficient to meet demand.[5] And, without a viable language office to manage personnel capability and language requirements, language talent in the Air Force total force is unknown and untapped.[6] To effectively use the language capability in the ARC, these issues must be addressed. The objective of this paper is to offer several solutions to help meet the language needs of the Air Force.

CHAPTER 2 – IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY IN THE USAF

Fluency in the local language leads to an understanding of the culture in which the language is embedded. Without the capability to operate in a given culture, a unit or an individual will, at best, realize only limited success. At worst, an operational unit will find itself alienated from its environment.
                                                          -Kurt E. Muller
                              On the Military Significance of Language Competence

The Air Force requires language-proficient personnel to operate successfully in today's global environment. To meet USAF requirements, multiple training resources are available to develop personnel with language capability, but the Air Force has not developed a plan to use the resources available or identify the right mix of language-proficient personnel.

Global Wars Require Language Capability

The ability of Air Force personnel to speak a foreign language is a critical component to effectively conduct world-wide military operations in the 21st century. During the Cold War, the enemy was Russia and the most important language requirement from the DoD was Russian. Now, the Air Force is fighting the Global War On Terrorism (GWOT) and operating in 140 countries around the world.[7] Operations in diverse locations such as Grenada, Panama, the Persian Gulf, Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, USAF members are working in multiple capacities. For example, USAF members serve with host-nation personnel at forward operating bases, design civil engineering projects, perform detainee operations, and lead military transition teams. Liaison officers at country desks in the Pentagon talk with their counterpart in a foreign country. In addition, USAF personnel participate in counter-drug operations around the world. To effectively meet these missions and other emerging contingencies, the USAF needs to develop and maintain a corps of personnel with language expertise.

A significant portion of military foreign language competence is pigeon-holed into the category of military intelligence, and like other military services, the intelligence career field has the preponderance of the current language ability in the USAF.[8] In addition to the intelligence career field, there are a myriad of other military personnel who require foreign language skills: medical professionals, International Airmen Specialists, translators, Office of Special Investigation, and Special Operations Forces, to name a few. Further, the support functions of security, logistics, and engineering, which historically did not require language proficiency, are now operating routinely on the front lines and require additional language skills. Those career fields and communities which are working directly with host nation personnel in military operations other than war (MOOTW) in Africa, South America, Eurasia, and, the Middle East further require additional language capabilities.

Air Force leadership profoundly and directly redefined the service's mission in light of a new international-security arena, stating that the ability of the Air Force to engage globally, using both lethal and non-lethal means, is vital to today's national security challenges.[9] A foreign language capable Air Force is necessary to achieve mission success in today's global environment.

Resources to Teach Foreign Languages

There are over 4,000 official languages in the world, and developing the right mix of personnel, with available educational venues, is paramount to developing a cadre of language-proficient personnel. The Department of Defense has identified 26 current and future language requirements on their Strategic Language List (SLL).[10] The Air Force then identified 51 foreign languages on their SLL.[11] School children in the U.S. are taught a handful of languages, such as Spanish, French, German, and Russian, but rarely the other languages that are important to the

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success of military operations. Nor can the Air Force rely on U.S. colleges and universities to produce language scholars as a panacea: about half of those that host Air Force Reserve Officer's Training Corps (ROTC) units do not offer much more than the standard fare of French, German, and Spanish.[12]

The Foreign Service Institute (FSI) developed courses by the State Department for open source learning. SAF/IA sends officers to the FSI to develop language skills for future embassy positions. Yet, the most heavily relied on formal language training school for the Air Force is the Defense Language Institute, Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC), in Monterey, California.[13] The majority of the Air Force officer graduates (ninety percent) from DLIFLC enter into the Intelligence career field, with most of the others going to SAF/IA. For those not attending formal language schools, the most popular self-study programs available to Air Force members are Rosetta Stone, Transparent Language, and Tactical Language. These programs are available on-line, through CD-ROMs, and downloadable MP3 files that a learner can use with an iPod or MP3 player.

Once a language level is achieved, the Air Force uses private tutors to assist language-proficient officers maintain a level of fluency. Tutors are effective, but quite expensive. The Language and Area Studies Immersion (LASI) program has proven extremely effective as well. As the name implies, LASI is an immersion program where an officer's sole duty for a month is to talk with people in a foreign country. For example, French LASI students can spend a month in Paris, France. The program is run from SAF/IA and is available primarily for those officers designated to become Attachés. It is also expensive, and very limited in who can attend.

The USAF sends Majors and Lieutenant Colonels to foreign-speaking professional military education schools; for example, the George C. Marshall, European Center for Security

Studies in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. These officers, upon graduation, usually work on the Air Staff, a combatant command staff, or as political-military advisors. Similarly, the USAF sends a small group of officers to attend foreign work study programs—most notably the Mansfield Foundation (for Japanese studies) and the Olmstead Foundation which selects officers to attend foreign universities around the world. The personnel who attend these universities will also usually work on the Air Staff or a combatant command staff after graduation.

These programs, and others, are available for Air Force members to obtain foreign language training. The USAF has the resources available to educate a cadre of language professionals; however, the Air Force must identify the right mix of language-proficient personnel.

Personnel with Language Capability

Identifying the right person with the right language ability is the key to meeting Air Force language needs. At present, almost a quarter of Air Force personnel are deployed overseas at any one time performing peacekeeping, humanitarian, coalition building, and security assistance missions.[14] Yet, the Air Force has not resolved the issue of language proficiency.[15] A Government Accountability Office (GAO) report in 1994 noted that the USAF does not have a Command Language Program[16] and today, they still do not have an overarching program for language competency.[17] Because the Air Force does not have a language program, it does not know what language skills it needs. Today, the Air Force cannot identify how many Polish, Persian, Dari or any other language speakers they need. The Air Force does not know what career fields require language proficiency, nor in what officer and enlisted ranks in those career fields language proficiency is most important. These three core problems of language deficiency in the Air Force will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

Several communities within the Air Force have looked at the issue of language proficiency within their force structure and they have identified current language requirements. The Air Force version of the Foreign Area Officer (FAO) program is in the infancy stages of development in the Regional Affairs Strategist (RAS) officer. The program anticipates the need to develop 30 officers per year and maintain a corps of 300 regional (and language) proficient officers to work in a variety of billets, but mainly as air or defense attachés in U.S. Embassies. The Air Force medical service's International Health Specialist (IHS) program is similar in size and scope to the Air Force FAO program. As of April 2004, 234 members representing 34 languages hold an IHS designation.[18] The USAF Special Operations Command fields six Special Tactics Squadrons and one Special Operations Squadron. The personnel in these units, in conjunction with their rigorous training pipeline, are also fluent in a language in the geographical region to which they are assigned.[19] These three communities have identified a language requirement and identified an individual to meet the requirement when the time arises—the rest of the Air Force, however, has not.

CHAPTER 3 – LANGUAGE DEFICIENCIES AND PROBLEMS IN THE USAF

Post 9/11 military operations reinforce the reality that the Department of Defense needs a significantly improved organic capability in emerging languages and dialects, a greater competence and regional area skills in those languages and dialects, and a surge capability to rapidly expand its language capabilities on short notice.
                                        -2005 Defense Language Transformation Roadmap

Although the DoD can demonstrate where language-proficient personnel have met language needs, it also has high-profile examples of deficiencies where it was not prepared. The Air Force can mitigate these deficiencies by addressing four core areas: establish a language office, determine language requirements, manage languages, and use the strategic reserves.

<u>Examples of Deficiencies and Their Impact</u>

Language skills within the Air Force are inadequate. With only 11 serving general officers (out of three hundred in the active Air Force) and 185 colonels (out of four thousand) fluent in a foreign language, the importance of yet another capability and demand on our Air Force people is bound to be questioned.[20] The Air Force recognizes that language skills provide at least ancillary contributions to operations. However, Air Force leadership has never sanctioned language as a vital ingredient of professional education or career development.[21] Indeed, historically, the Department of Defense has not placed an emphasis on foreign language capability until the requirement arises. This approach reflects the American mindset that English is the globally-preferred language, therefore, foreign language proficiency is unimportant and language programs can be ignored.[22]

Since World War II, language proficiency has remained an issue within the DoD. A greater emphasis on language skills has been an on-going concern, but numerous studies and recommendations have failed to address the shortage of language professionals. For example, at Khobar Towers, the 4404th Wing had only one interpreter on duty or on-call 24-hours a day. When Air Force Security Police needed to talk to their Saudi Arabian civilian police counterpart, they first had to contact the interpreter, brief him on the situation, and request that he contact the local police. During regular force protection meetings, Saudi officials provided letters to U.S. personnel that addressed ongoing security concerns. Frequently, however, these letters were never translated from Arabic into English.[23] These letters could have indicated a warning or at least produced credible intelligence. The Downing Commission that investigated the 1996 attack at Khobar Towers cited a lack of Air Force interpreters as a contributing factor.

Even just one American who can speak the local language can make a significant difference. In Mosul, Iraq, an Army FAO who spoke the native language determined the infiltration route of foreign fighters from Syria into Iraq even though two dozen Army Rangers had previously failed to do so. This same FAO also discovered that Iraqi interpreters hired to translate for general officers had lied about their backgrounds and language capabilities.[24] To be fair, the Rangers (who are required to have foreign language skills) went in as a team, were in full-uniform, clean shaven, and fully armed. On the other hand, the FAO went in alone, wore civilian clothing, sported a goatee, and only carried a handgun.[25] This example is not meant to point out disparities between the Army Rangers and the Army FAO program, but is intended to show the impact of one language-proficient soldier. The FAO was returned to his home station in Yemen, leaving the Mosul, Iraq area of operation without any Arabic-proficient speakers.

Each of these cases demonstrates the importance of more language capability in each of the military services. In each example, the operations could have progressed more efficiently and expediently if the services developed additional language-proficient members and staffed them during operations. However, doing so is difficult for the Air Force, because the service does not have a mechanism or process to identify an Airman with language skills.

The deficiencies of the previous examples stem from three core problems in the Air Force: they do not have an overall language program; there is no system in place to manage language needs and capability; and there is no plan to manage language-proficient personnel.

No Language Program Office

The Department of Defense requires each service to develop a language program and ostensibly, an office to manage the program.[26] The Air Force Chief of Staff appointed the Director of Air Force Personnel and Manpower (AF/A1) as the senior language authority.[27] To

meet this requirement, the Air Force created AF/A1DLL, the Air Force Language and Culture Office. This office manages the Air Force Culture, Region, and Language Center, which was created in 2006, at Maxwell AFB, Alabama. This office recently released a draft culture, region and language strategy in July 2008.[28] While the draft is an excellent start, the strategy still relies on just-in time solutions with language ability focused on a few specific career fields, and does not incorporate the Air Reserve Components into the strategy. Because neither the Center nor their strategy addresses any of the core language problems, it is the author's view that the Air Force does not have an overall language program.

No Office to Manage Languages

Because it does not have a language program, the Air Force also does not have the ability to effectively manage languages. To effectively manage languages, the USAF not only needs to identify which languages are immediate investment or strategic stronghold,[29] but which career fields need language proficiency, at what level the language proficiency should be, and what ranks (both officer and enlisted) should have language proficiency. For example, the Georgian language is not identified on the Department of Defense SLL, but it is identified on the Air Force SLL as an "other" language, which means the language has a strategic value to the Air Force. In March 2008, the Air Force sent an Air Attaché to the country of Georgia. At the time, the Air Force did not have a single officer that spoke Georgian, so the Air Force sent a member that spoke Russian instead.[30] The author is not suggesting that the Air Force needs an officer that speaks Georgian nor that the Air Force needs to prepare an officer that speaks Georgian. Yet it can be questioned as to whether the Air Force Attaché that is now working in Georgia is as effective as he could be if he spoke Georgian in addition to Russian. Certainly, without a language program, the Air Force will continue having difficulty managing languages.

No Office to Manage Language-Proficient Personnel

Without a language program in the Air Force, it does not have the ability to effectively manage language-proficient personnel. Current Air Force databases reflect outdated language proficiency information and require manual manipulation to determine the service's actual language capability.[31] To compound the problem, the Air Force personnel system does not include Air Reserve Component personnel, which include both the Air National Guard (ANG) and the Air Force Reserve (AFRES). Even though personnel information for USAF and ARC reside in the same database, only a Guard or Reserve personnelist can retrieve specific ARC information. This issue only enhances the Air Force's difficulty in managing its language-proficient personnel.

Use of Strategic Reserve

The three deficiencies listed above are the root cause of language deficiency in the Air Force that lead to specific failures in the operational environment. The fourth key area is the use of the strategic reserves. When correcting the three deficiencies, the Air Force needs to incorporate the Air Reserve Components into the language office in order to identify language-proficient personnel and managing languages. The ANG and the AFRES are the surge capability for the USAF. To meet the surge capability, the ARC must be included in the operation of the Air Force language office, language-proficient personnel in the ARC must be identified, and languages must be identified for ARC to fill.

Since Operation Desert Storm, the integration of the Air Reserve Components with the active duty forces has increased significantly. Personnel from the ARC attend the same training and education schools, the same professional military education schools, and the same exercises as the regular Air Force personnel. ARC personnel deploy to the same locations, and they are

deploying for the same time period as the active duty forces. But there are still differences. The

ANG does not have any OSI agents, nor do they have any International Affairs Specialists.

However, the ANG does operate the State Partnership Program (SPP) which pairs individual

states with a foreign country. Washington State has a great working relationship with Thailand,

and Virginia started has a relationship with Tajikistan. The Air Force does not have a SPP.

Thus, when the Air Force stands up a language office, the ARC must be included to fully

integrate the total force capabilities.

CHAPTER 4 – SOLUTIONS FOR LANGUAGE DEFICIENCIES IN THE USAF

> *The United States Air Force projects power globally, but it cannot
> communicate in the native language of the countries where it flies and fights.
> The absence of a central language program, an outdated database, and
> uncertain requirements force it to recall reservists, hire contractors, and
> create "just-in-time" training to meet each need.*
> -Col John L. Conway III, USAF, Retired
> *Air & Space Power Journal*

The Air Force does not know where future conflicts will occur. Present worldwide U.S.

forces are operating in countries with about 140 languages. The Air Force has about 6,000

officers with a tested capability in about 54 languages. The enlisted force is a little higher, with

about 9,000 personnel with measurable language ability.[32] With these numbers, the Air Force

cannot meet the current language requirements from within its own force. The Air Force is

hiring contractors to fill language requirements on an as-needed basis and allowing other

positions to go unfilled. Yet, the Air Force is required to meet DoD language requirements. To

do this, the author offers several solutions.

<u>Create a Language Program Office</u>

The first goal of the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap is to establish a

language office.[33] This is the pinnacle of the problem since without a language office; the

following solutions will have little to no effect on addressing the issues with language proficiency in the Air Force. Regardless of whether the office is created in AF/A1 or at the Air Force Language and Culture Office, the total force needs to be involved. The unique capabilities of the ARC must be incorporated into the overall language plan.

Identify Current Language Requirements

Once a language office is created; the Air Force then needs to identify language requirements. At the highest level, geographical combatant commands, specific regional languages are defined. The Air Force Southern Command (AFSOUTH), a component of Southern Command, encompasses countries that speak primarily Spanish, Portuguese, and French. For example, if an Airman is assigned to AFSOUTH there is no reason for the individual to learn Russian. But, below combatant commands, the regional distinction disappears. Air Mobility Command (AMC), for instance, operates in every geographical combatant command. It would be futile to identify languages that personnel should study within AMC—every language would be required. Languages can be identified most effectively and reasonably at the career field level.

The idea of specific career fields and communities achieving language proficiency is not new. Certain career fields, like intelligence, require their members to have language skills in order to perform their job. What is new is the increasing number of career fields that now need language skills to accomplish their jobs. Security Forces missions have evolved over the past decade from a force that provided base defense inside the wire, to a force that interacts with host-nation personnel on a daily basis outside the wire.[34] A good argument can be made that an increased number of Security Forces personnel should have designated language proficiency.[35]

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This argument also applies to Medical personnel, Office of Special Investigations personnel, and the entire Special Operations Forces community, among others.

Language-Designated and Language-Inherent Positions

Having personnel that are focused on their careers, and who also have a language capability, is the optimum combination for the Air Force. However, the USAF assigns language capability as either "designated" or "inherent." Officer Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) positions are language-designated. For example, a pilot that can speak Spanish, or an Attaché that can speak Tagalog are in language-designated positions. The primary duty for the individual is first a pilot or an attaché and a second is to speak the necessary foreign language. In comparison, enlisted AFSC positions are language-inherent. For example, a linguist or interpreter is the primary function of a language-inherent position. The individual's primary duty is the language capability.[36] A language-inherent position would not be a maintenance or civil engineering position that requires a language capability.

To understand the importance of language-designated and language-inherent positions in the Air Force, consider the following example. The Air Force decides to send an Expeditionary Air Wing to Soto Cano Air Base, Honduras.[37] The wing plans section determines every asset in the wing that is necessary to complete the mission; from every piece of equipment to every person, whether including pilots, maintainers, logisticians, civil engineers, and interpreters. For a mission of this size, roughly 1,000 personnel and usually one to two Spanish interpreters (language-inherent position) would be assigned to deploy.[38] Depending on the mission, there would most likely be no need for any language-designated positions. In this case, only one to two personnel would serve the language needs of 1,000 personnel. Normally, no further thought is placed on identifying maintenance, logistician, or civil engineer personnel with language

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skills. Once the wing deploys and discovers they do not have enough Spanish speakers, they hire contractors to fill the requirement.

However, the best alternative is for commanders in the wing to identify Spanish speakers in their sections, and send them on the deployment in addition to the interpreter. These personnel could be Security Forces members, logisticians, or Doctors, and their primary job on the deployment would be their respective career field specific duty. But, when necessary, they could also use their language skills to enhance the wing's mission. Taking the scenario one step further, imagine a vehicle drives up to the main gate of the base, and the driver is frantically trying to talk to the Security Forces personnel at the gate in Spanish. Normally, the gate guard would have to find the interpreter, wait for the interpreter to arrive, and then translate back and forth the driver's and Security Force's conversation. An alternative is to send a couple of Security Forces personnel who also speak Spanish. This could result in a decrease in lives lost, especially if the local was trying to warn the base of an impending attack. If there are no Spanish speakers in the section then, to reduce costs, increase efficiency and effectiveness, the Air Force should request the ARC to activate and deploy Spanish-proficient personnel to fill the requirement.

Relying on language-inherent and language-designated positions in the Air Force is overlooking other language-proficient personnel. Instead of focusing on sending an interpreter, the USAF needs to focus on sending language-proficient personnel.

Identify Personnel with Language Capability

Following a 1996 total force process action team recommendation, the Air Force implemented a foreign language self-assessment survey for all active duty and ARC personnel. The survey was not mandatory, but it did identify nearly 27,000 people with 207 language

capabilities.[39] This survey received just over 50 percent return, and only tracked self assessment—not tested language ability. After the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap mandated that all services conduct an assessment of their forces, the Air Force conducted another self-assessment in 2006 of its active duty members.[40] The Air Force needs to conduct a mandatory language self-assessment of all of its personnel to meet Department of Defense requirements.[41] The ARC must require every member to complete a language certification as well, and not just a self assessment, but actually take the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) to meet DoD mandates. Admittedly, this testing will take time, but it will be the first time the Air Force will have an idea of its total force language capability.

It is a concern that the ANG is saddled with enough required training now that their members can not complete current mandatory training during drill weekends and annual training. Adding another requirement on top of an already full work-load is not going to be easy in the current operations tempo. However, the ANG has already been successful in identifying everyone with an annual firearms qualification and everyone who has completed annual physical training. Identifying every Airman with language capability in the ANG is just as important and critical to meeting surge requirements. Once ANG members with a language capability are identified, then the Air Force is one step closer to meeting the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap's goal of creating foundational language and cultural expertise in the officer, civilian, and enlisted ranks for both active duty and Air Reserve Components.[42]

Incentive of Language Proficiency Pay

The desired outcome for personnel with language skills is for them to be able to respond to peace and wartime missions with the correct level of proficiency.[43] One way to encourage Air Force members to learn and maintain a foreign language is through the Department of Defense

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Foreign Language Proficiency Pay (FLPP) program.[44] In 2005, the Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness, approved an increase in bonuses and special pays intended to affect a desired outcome of increased language proficiency. The Under Secretary also, finally, authorized all Reserve Component personnel to receive FLPP. The addition of ARC personnel's ability to receive FLPP in 2005 is a significant step in the right direction. Up to this point, ARC personnel had no incentive to take the DLPT. Now with the added bonus and pay, hopefully the ARC will start taking the DLPT and their unique skill sets will become available.

A disincentive for a relatively few people in the Air Force is that some officer and enlisted members do not want to identify themselves as speaking a certain language because they do not want to deploy to a specific region. For example, some Arabic speakers in the Air Force do not want to self-identify their language skills because they do not want to be sent back to a place they may have been trying to get away from.[45] However, the enticement of proficiency pay may outweigh the disincentive of returning to a country where an Airman does not want to go. Further, the enticement of proficiency pay is meant to encourage personnel to study a language, sustain or increase their current level of proficiency, and to increase the overall language capability within the Department of Defense.

The Air Force Military Personnel Data System

The database that is used to collect and store all personnel information in the Air Force is the Military Personnel Data System (MilPDS). It is an all inclusive database in the sense that all personnel data for active duty, Guard, and Reserve members are stored in the same database. The problem with the system is not in the database itself, but instead in the retrieval mechanism, or process used to extract information. Active duty personnel use the Airman Management System (AMS) and Guard personnel use the Virtual Military Personnel Flight (vMPF) system.

These two systems interface with the same database, but an active duty personnelist can not retrieve information on Guard personnel and a Guard personnelist can not retrieve information on active duty personnel.

The author understands that the two systems are in place and are distinct from one another to prevent the active duty force from directing a Guard member to fill an active duty position. Or more technically, a Title 10 person can not direct a Title 32 person to active duty[46]. However, the current process in place does not allow this scenario to occur. The process in place is the active duty force identifies a need and they request the force to fill the need. A personnelist looks in the active duty rosters and can either find the right person and fill the need or can not find the right person and informs the Air Force there is no person with the required skills. If the latter choice is determined, then the Air Force can fill the position from the ARC, a civilian, or a contractor. Usually the contractor is the easiest, and quickest, route to take.

If the active duty personnelist was able to identify a Guard member with the right skills, then the personnelist could inform the Air Force no one in the active duty has the required skills, but there is an individual in the ANG that does. At this point, the Air Force, instead of going straight to the contracting office, could request the ANG fill the position first. This does not mean the ANG will be able to fill the position or that the ANG will fill every language position the Air Force identifies. The Air Force may still need to fill positions with civilians or contractors—or worse, let positions go unfilled.

Most importantly, using the Air National Guard reduces the need to use a civilian linguist reserve corps, a group that may not understand how to effectively work with the military in times of crisis and who are not used to joint military operations.[47] Further, using an existing corps such as the ANG eliminates the need to train personnel on an overnight-basis when specific

languages are needed. Rather than sending personnel for language training for a specific language during crunch time, when it would typically take years to develop a language skill,[48] it would be smarter, more efficient, and certainly less stressful, to use an ANG member who already knows the language.

Acknowledge Language is a Perishable Skill

Language proficiency, like many skills, is extremely perishable. If the skill is not used in a meaningful manner and with some frequency, the skill will be lost. Using language-proficient personnel is critical to maintaining a desired level of proficiency—whatever that level may be. There are several ways to achieve this goal such as deploying an individual to an area where a language skill is used. The Central Command area of responsibility is a good example. A permanent change of station move to an overseas assignment where the language skill is another example. Moving to Germany and living with the local populace and speaking German on off-duty time to maintain a level of proficiency is a third example. Further, utilizing some sort of immersion program is a very effective method. Self-study with Rosetta Stone, or watching local (foreign) news programs on SCOLA is also very effective, but accomplished solely on the individual's own time and initiative. FLPP will help, but if an individual is not in a situation where his language skills are used, it is incumbent upon the individual to maintain his fluency. Since the goal is to keep personnel proficient by using their language skills, the ANG members with ties to a local cultural community have the best chance of maintaining fluency on their own.

Use of the ANG as a Strategic Reserve

The best alternative to sending personnel without any language capability to learn a language is to recruit personnel with some measurable language skill. These recruits will become proficient in a specific career field and they will continue to maintain their language

skills on their own—with the assistance of FLPP. The ANG draws from specific cultural communities. For example, the local ANG unit in Springfield, Ohio draws heavily from the local Polish community, the local ANG unit at Biggs Army Air Field, Texas, draws from the Spanish community, and the ANG unit north of Detroit draws from the local Arabic community. Because the members of these units are drawn from the local community, and stay with the local community, their language (and cultural) ties remain intact.

This is key: these ANG members are career-focused and they have a language capability. They are not focused on linguist or interpreter duties, they focus on their career field specific capability first and they have the ability to speak another language second. The USAF specifically develops enlisted and officers to learn a language to fill language-designated and language inherent-positions. However, the USAF does not specifically identify or target language-proficient recruits to join its ranks. The ANG does not specifically target language-proficient recruits either, but Guard members are more apt to be a part of a local ethnic community. And, the Guard member is usually not trained or assigned to a language-designated or language-inherent position.

<u>Create the Capacity to Surge</u>

Goal 3 of the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap (DLTR) is for linguists to maintain a language proficiency of 3/3/3 (reading/listening/speaking) ability.[49] That said, not every person needs to be a linguist as that is overkill for many Air Force members with a growing myriad of technical and professional responsibilities.[50] The 3/3/3 level of proficiency is at the graduate degree level of education, where a 2/2 proficiency is at the associate degree level of education. In most instances a tested level of 2/2 might work. The 2/2 level of proficiency indicates significant comprehension of the foreign language. The author is not advocating

lowering language proficiency standards, but asserting that in some instances a lower level of proficiency might be adequate to complete the mission. Keep in mind, in a lot of positions where language proficiency is needed, an Air Force member is dealing with host nation personnel, some of whom have not progressed past primary school. On the other hand, an Air Attaché must be able to speak at or above the 3/3/3 level because they are communicating with a host country's educated elite.

The capacity to surge is the responsibility of the Air Reserve Components. The Air National Guard and the Air Force Reserve (AFRES) are intended and designed to provide a surge capability, from any career field, to the active duty forces. If members of the ARC have a tested 2/2 proficiency in a foreign language, they could be used effectively, but first, the ARC must identify all language-proficient personnel to create a surge capability.

CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION

> *If our Soldiers spoke Arabic we could have resolved Iraq in two years. My*
> *point is that language is obviously an obstacle to our success, much more so*
> *than cultural. Even a fundamental understanding of the language would have*
> *had a significant impact on our ability to operate.*
> -MAJ Kenneth Carey, USA, 1st BCT, 1st CAV
> *Building Language Skills and Cultural Competencies in the Military*

Creating a language program in the Air Force is the first step. Identifying language proficiency and managing language requirements are the next two steps. Then pursuing ideas on how to meet the goals of the Roadmap can proceed—with a total force perspective. In order to address its language capability shortfalls, the USAF needs to establish a language office, determine language requirements, identify the appropriate personnel with the required language proficiency and recognize the value of the Air Reserve Components as a strategic reserve.

ACRONYMS

AFRES – Air Force Reserves
AFSC – Air Force Specialty Code
AFSOUTH – Air Force Southern Command
AMC – Air Mobility Command
AMS – Airman Management System
ANG – Air National Guard
ARC – Air Reserve Component
DIA – Defense Intelligence Agency
DLI – Defense Language Institute
DLIFLI – Defense Language Institute, Foreign Language Center
DLPT – Defense Language Proficiency Test
DLTR – Defense Language Transformation Roadmap
DoD – Department of Defense
DoDI – Department of Defense Instruction
FAO – Foreign Area Officer
FLPP – Foreign Language Proficiency Pay
FSI – Foreign Language Institute
GAO – Government Accountability Office
GWOT – Global War On Terrorism
HIS – International Health Specialist
JSOU – Joint Special Operations University
LASI – Language and Area Studies Immersion
MilPDS – Military Personnel Data System
MOOTW – Military Operations Other Than War
RAS – Regional Area Strategist
ROTC – Reserve Officer's Training Corps
SAF/IA – Secretary of the Air Force, International Affairs
SPP – State Partnership Program
SSL – Strategic Language List
USAF – United States Air Force
vMPF – Virtual Military Personnel Flight

NOTES

[1] Col Gunther A. Mueller, USAF and Lt Col Carl Daubach, USAF, "Global Skills: Vital Components of Global Engagement," *Airpower Journal*, (Summer 1998), page 65. This article references a 1988 DIA assessment.

[2] Col John L. Conway III, USAF (Ret), "The View from the Tower of Babel: Air Force Foreign Language Posture for Global Engagement," *Air & Space Power Journal*, (Summer 2005), page 59. This statement was also made by Col Mueller in his Global Skills article on page 65 and the 1994 GAO report.

[3] Col Gunther A. Mueller, "Global Skills," page 68-69.

[4] Defense Language Transformation Roadmap, (Washington D.C., Department of Defense, January 2005), page 8.

[5] Defense Language Transformation Roadmap, January 2005, page 3.

[6] Defense Language Transformation Roadmap, January 2005, page 3.

[7] Col John L. Conway III, "The View from the Tower of Babel," page 61.

[8] Col Gunther A. Mueller, "Global Skills," page 66.

[9] Col Gunther A. Mueller, "Global Skills," page 66, quoting "Global Engagement: A Vision for the 21st Century Air Force," (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Air Force, January 1997).

[10] David S. C. Chu, Undersecretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness, *Fiscal Year 2006 Department of Defense Strategic Language List*, (Memorandum dated 26 October 2005).

[11] Brig Gen Robert R. Allardice, USAF, Deputy Chief of Staff, Manpower and Personnel, *Air Force Strategic Language List*, (Memorandum dated 1 June 2006).

[12] Col John L. Conway III, USAF (Ret), "Montag Speaks Farsi: A New Approach to Air Force Language Needs," *Air University*, (AU Quick Look 08-0), page 1.

[13] Defense Language Transformation Roadmap, January 2005, page 4.

[14] Col Gunther A. Mueller, "Global Skills," page 66, quoting "Global Engagement: A Vision for the 21st Century Air Force," (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Air Force, January 1997).

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[16] Col Gunther A. Mueller, "Global Skills," page 66, quoting "Global Engagement: A Vision for the 21st Century Air Force," (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Air Force, January 1997).

[17] Col Gunther A. Mueller, "Global Skills," page 66, quoting "Global Engagement: A Vision for the 21st Century Air Force," (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Air Force, January 1997).

[18] Col John L. Conway III, "The View from the Tower of Babel," page 61.

[19] Special Operations Forces Reference Manual, Second Edition, (Joint Special Operations University, August 2008), page 5-43, and 5-45.

[20] Col Gunther A. Mueller, "Global Skills," page 69, quoting "AFPC/DPS, DIN PDS Report," (31 December 1996).

[21] Rusty E. Shugart, Maj, USAF, "The Development of the Air Force Foreign Area Officer Program" *FAO Journal*, (December 2000, Volume V, Number 4), page 11.

[22] Col Gunther A. Mueller, "Global Skills," page 69.

[23] Col John L. Conway III, "The View from the Tower of Babel," page 59.

[24] Stephen Schwalbe, "Potential Air Force Shortfalls in Implementing the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap," *Air & Space Power Journal*, (Spring 2007, Volume 21, Issue 1), page 1.

[25] Greg Jaffe, "Local Knowledge: In Iraq, One Officer Uses Cultural Skills To Fight Insurgents; While Talking Like a Bedouin He Sees Smuggling Routes; Spotting a Phony Kurd; Army Has Recalled His Unit," *Wall Street Journal*, (2005, November 15, Eastern Edition), p. A.1. This article is also mentioned in the Stephen Schwalbe piece.

[26] Department of Defense Directive, 5160.41E, Defense Language Program (DLP), (October 21, 2005), page 7.

[27] T. Michael Moseley, Gen, Air Force Chief of Staff, *Air Force Cultural, Regional and Linguistic Competency Framework*, (Memorandum dated 29 Jan 07).

[28] The Air Force Culture Region, and Language Center, *Air Force Culture, Region, and Language Strategy*, (Draft, 31 July 2008). Page 5 states as an end-state to develop Airmen with just-in-time language ability to meet Air Force needs. The draft only mentions the Guard and Reserve in one place, page 10, that talks about refining personnel database systems.

[29] Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness, "Approval to Change Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 7280.3, "Special Pay for Foreign Language Proficiency," February 23, 2000," (Memorandum dated Nov 30, 2005).

[30] SAF/IAPA worked on this issue in March 2008, Georgian is considered a non-strategic language—meaning the Department of Defense does not require any substantial capability or a requirement for in-house capability to speak this language.

[31] Col John L. Conway III, "The View from the Tower of Babel," page 64.

[32] Col John L. Conway III, "The View from the Tower of Babel," page 61.

[33] Defense Language Transformation Roadmap, January 2005, page 4.

[34] Traditional Security Forces roles involved providing Air Base Defense, or security, inside the base perimeter. The base perimeter is usually delineated by a tall, chain-linked fence, with a trip-strand of barbed wire on top—hence the term; inside the wire. The typical Security Forces mission now includes everything from convoy operations in Iraq to leading Military Transition Teams in Afghanistan—or outside the wire.

[35] Stephen J. Morree, Major, USAF, "USAF Security Forces and Foreign Language Skills in the Global Environment: are we Prepared?," *Air University*, (Command and Staff College, April 1999), page 1.

[36] Col John L. Conway III, "The View from the Tower of Babel," page 60.

[37] Joint Task Force-Bravo, is currently assigned to Soto Cano Air Base, Honduras. An expeditionary Air Wing is not assigned to the base—this was used for example only. However, members of the Air Force medical, security forces, weather, and civil engineering communities are stationed on the base and they have to interact with the local population on a daily basis.

[38] There are too many examples to consider in this example; but an Expeditionary Group or Squadron would not have an interpreter assigned. If the wing is going to be co-located with another unit, for example Joint Base Balad in Iraq, the Expeditionary Air Wing would not include an interpreter. But overall, the optimal goal is to send one interpreter with a wing.

[39] Col Gunther A. Mueller, "Global Skills," page 68.

[40] U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations, "Building Language Skills and Cultural Competencies in the Military: DoD's Challenge in Today's Educational Environment," (Committee Print 110-12, November, 2008), page 46.

[41] Col Conway suggested this requirement in his article, "The View from the Tower of Babel", page 64. It is also a requirement listed in the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap, required action, 1J, page 6.

[42] Defense Language Transformation Roadmap, January 2005, page 1.

[43] Defense Language Transformation Roadmap, January 2005, page 4.

44 Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness, "Approval to Change Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 7280.3, "Special Pay for Foreign Language Proficiency," February 23, 2000," (Memorandum dated Nov 30, 2005).

45 This is from personal experience. During an initial Commander's interview, I identified a Staff Sergeant that spoke Lebanese Arabic. This is a DoD immediate investment language. I suggested that he take the DLPT, and mentioned that he could possibly receive FLPP depending on his score. He refused because he does not want to go back to Lebanon or any country near Lebanon because his family fled the region for their safety.

46 This is the answer the author received from the Air Force Personnel Center data retrieval specialists while trying to find specific Guard personnel information while working with SAF/IA. The author also spoke with two former Military Personnel Flight officers who verified this information.

47 Defense Language Transformation Roadmap, January 2005, page 7.

48 Col Gunther A. Mueller, "Global Skills," page 69.

49 Defense Language Transformation Roadmap, January 2005, page 10.

50 Col Gunther A. Mueller, "Global Skills," page 68.

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